



Perennial Notes

September 2000

Gardening is about looking forward to the results of all that effort, and accepting the results that come to be. One day a look through a garden magazine brings sighs and the impossibility of creating anything as wonderful as the vast gardens surrounding an English manor house. Then spring arrives and the small grouping of primrose planted last fall has blooms in lovely shades of pastel pink and lavender, with contrasting yellow eyes. At that moment, small becomes quite grand and you see all the possibilities emerge. —*The Diary of a Perennial Novice* Robb Rosser

COMING EVENTS!

September 20, 2000, 7:00 p.m., Olbrich Gardens. Gene Bush, Munchkinn Nursery, Depauw, Indiana. Gene specializes in native and nonnative woodland wildflowers. Title of his presentation will be: *Well, what do you know? Woodland wildflowers and their relatives.*

September 23, 2000, Saturday 9:00-10:30 a.m.. *WHPS Great Perennial Divide and Seed Exchange.* Phyllis Sanner will host the event on her farm in Brooklyn. Phil's been digging and dividing lilies for weeks to share. Bring along clumps of stuff you wish to share or trade. Bring the seeds you have been harvesting. It's a great opportunity to get free seeds and lots of free advice on how to germinate it! This has been a fun event in the past. Frank promises to have *Nicotiana niobe* seed for all of you who have helicopters to view the flowers! South on Hwy 14 beyond County Trunk A—Turn right on Hwy 92 into Brooklyn—Turn left on Hwy 104 in Brooklyn and head south for 3.2 miles—all white farm buildings with red roofs; Fire # N8257 (Tel 608-882-5211). See you there.

October 18, 2000, 7:00 p.m., Olbrich Gardens. Terry Hollendbeck, Meadow Herbs (Monroe, WI) *Gardening with Herbs* (note, this is not cooking with herbs!)

November 4, 2000. *Gardening from the Catalogue.* Olbrich Gardens annual fall symposium. Speakers will be Tony Avent (Plant Delight Nursery), Roy Klehm (Nursery), John Elsley (Wayside Gardens) and Hans Hansen (Shady Oaks Nursery).

November 15, 2000, 7:00 p.m., Olbrich Gardens. *Members' Potpourri*, Steve Harsy and others.

December 6, 2000, 7:00 p.m., Olbrich Gardens. Topic to be announced.

January 21, 2001, 11:00 a.m., Olbrich Gardens. *Annual Brunch and Highlights of the 2000 WHPS trip to England.*

February 21, 2001, 7:00 p.m., Olbrich Gardens. Topic to be announced.

March 21, 2001, 7:00 p.m., Olbrich Gardens. Topic to be announced.

April 18, 2001, 7:00 p.m., Olbrich Gardens. Richard Hawkey, *New Plant Evaluations at the Chicago Botanical Garden.*

May 19, 2001—Annual Plant Sale.

August 15, 2001—Potluck supper at Olbrich Gardens.

Future Trips of the WHPS

April 19-22, 2001—Gardens and Nurseries of Nashville, Tennessee. This bus trip will include a visit to the National Quilt Museum in Paducah,

Kentucky where we will have a look at the use of flora in quilt design; in Nashville we plan to visit Cheekwood (the city's botanical garden) in its spring glory, and with the help of some friends in the Middle Tennessee Perennial Society, private gardens and several specialty nurseries in the Nashville metro area. We are also considering a stop in Peoria or Springfield, IL, to visit a garden or nursery or two.

June, 2001—Nursery trip to the Milwaukee area—Johnson's, Leeds, and Monches Farm.

August 9-12, 2001—Gardens and Nurseries of Michigan. Details of this trip are being worked on by the travel committee.

October 13, 2001—Fall trip to Chiwaukee Prairie and Craig Bergman's autumn garden and nursery in Wingate Harbor, IL.

June 2002—Gardens of Northern England and Scotland.

Events with Other Plant Groups

October 7, 2000 Saturday. *Wisconsin Woody Plants Group trip to Fox Willow Farm* (garden conifers) in Woodstock, Illinois, *and Roy Klehm's new Beaver Creek Nursery* (somewhere along the Wisconsin-Illinois border). Call WHPS member Laura Jull for more details (276-7365, lgjull@facstaff.wisc.edu).

The WHPS Millennium Trip to the Gardens of England

Or More Horty Times with Franki and Max



June 15

Departure on Virgin Atlantic from O'Hare. Several of us drove together to the International Terminal without a hitch, despite the horrific summertime stories of construction delays on the NW Tollway to Chicago. The overnight flight was smooth and uneventful. We were checked into our hotel, The Copthorne, a country hotel near Gatwick Airport by 11 AM. I was impressed by the blue flowering Ceonanthus (wild lilac from the California chapparal) outside the hotel door.

We were off almost immediately by train to Hampton Court, built by Henry VIII. It was a mostly overcast afternoon, but Hampton Court Palace, perched on the Thames upriver from London, was in its glory.

The large common in front of the palace, with its trademark yews carved into giant dollops of whipped cream, was broken occasionally by marquees under construction for the big Hampton Court flower show in July. Especially notable was the "Privy Garden," in 1995 completely restored to the Baroque splendor of its appearance in 1702 during the occupancy of William III. I had read that its unveiling 5 years ago by Prince Charles was somewhat controversial in English gardening circles (la-dee -dah !), as previously the garden had been quite overgrown with massive trees that obstructed the view of the east facade of the palace and the view of the Thames. Personally, I liked its very formal "clipped" design, though others in our group were not moved by its fussiness.

Back at the Copthorne, 14 of us gathered for dinner in the lovely dining room overlooking a small courtyard garden, which included a small pond and fountain. The dinner topic of the evening was the rigors of travel, some experiences

qualifying as Alfred Hitchcock material. The great "floods" in the upper Midwest that week had caused numerous flight delays and cancellations, making travel to Peoria, let alone London, an adventure. I had nothing to contribute to the conversation and had a modicum of sympathy. Fortunately, most folks got this out of their systems that evening and travel woes were quickly forgotten, except for one poor bloke whose luggage did not catch up with us for seven days. He's writing a book on the joys of traveling for a week in Europe with only a tote carry-on bag. There is a chapter on what to wear every day and another one on how to survive by mooching various sundries from your traveling companions.

June 16

The first morning of the "official trip," went off, almost, without a hitch. We were greeted warmly by our guide, Frankie McCabe of London, and Max the coach driver, who had driven down from Durham the previous night. As 12 of us had been on the trip two years before, there was a little catching up to do. As we boarded the bus, it became apparent that their were strangers among us. Frankie announced that this was the "Wisconsin Hardy Plant Society's" trip of English gardens. Subsequently, two stowaways, a pair of elderly English ladies (referred to as "The Crinklies" in local parlance), were embarrassingly escorted off the wrong tour bus. This caused a slight delay, as we extracted their luggage from the morass under the coach before we could proceed.

It was a glorious sunny day, and within minutes we pulled up to our first garden, Nymans, belonging to the National Historic Trust. Though we had been divided into two groups, it was impossible to keep our eager mob together, as folks wandered hither and yon both to photograph and gasp at the garden.

We began to establish an obligatory code of conduct for the tour. Rule number one was never to step in front of anyone, thereby spoiling their camera shot with a view of your rear-end, which in most cases was not garden-worthy. This made for pretty slow going, as nearly everyone always wanted to shoot the same photo. Rule number two was to attire yourself appropriately in colors of gray, green or beige, otherwise you will personally destroy the color schemes of the English perennial border in everyone's photographs. Even the Guru of All Things "Green" appeared on occasion in bright red, a definite garden tour No No.

I felt sorry for our guides at Nymans, who spent much of their time talking to themselves. There was a lovely June border the highlight of which was a combination of purple cotinus, blue salvia, towering goatsbeard, and a two-tone deep red lupine. Only one individual got points off for gardening misconduct, as on the urging of his conspiring colleagues, he immortalized his foot by placing it in the very center of the border to check the label on the lupine--'My Castle'.

We took lunch in the garden restaurant and the ginger ice cream with orange cookies was a highlight of the day. There was big trouble rounding everyone up for the departure. As we were at our first Historic Trust garden shop, a few folks made purchases in such quantity that made it clear that they had no inkling that there would be 8 more days and 24 more garden shops to come. As one wise old cynic noted, "if you have seen one National Historic Trust garden shop, you have seen them all!"

A good part of the afternoon was spent crossing the Sussex Weald to the "South Downs" and the English Coast. There were the typical gorse bushes along the road, and we all wondered why the English called hills "downs"? In no time, the coach rolled into the beautiful sea coast town of Bournemouth and we alighted before the pale pink facade of the

Millennium Trip to England (continued)



Norfolk Royal Hotel, festooned appropriately with hanging baskets oozing with flowering annuals. Though it appeared to be an old, timeless Victorian edifice, a major renovation had turned the building into a hotel in 1988.

After check-in, most of us took off down the hill into the town. As it was a very warm sunny Saturday (both the first and last day of a typical English summer according to some sages), there were zillions of people milling about the resort. The main drawing point was the stream through the town center, which was bordered on both sides by a park, the "Bournemouth Garden." Needless to say, this was a lovely city park which included a showy rock garden right next to the ocean, and a pinetum with a hilltop gazebo from which we were concerted by a local brass ensemble. Well, all right, this was a little hokey!

The park had some wonderful woodies, including a rather large specimen of one of my favorites, *Acer shirasawanum* 'Aureum' (yellow full-moon maple). We also admired the large pink flowering Indian chestnuts in bloom (*Aesculus indica*) and a white rhododendron with enormous trumpets of flowers. There was the usual assortment of Hebes and of course, a Chilean lantern plant in full bloom.

Dinner at the hotel was a delight, with small tables and individual selections from the menu. Though I had the local brim, everyone else raved about their lamb. After dinner, we discovered two of our very own "blossoms" floating in the jacuzzi just off the dining room. They were thought to be *Manitowoca beautifca*, but we failed to identify the especially noteworthy cultivar.

After dinner, we took another "woodies" walk in the Bournemouth Garden. I am sad to say it was the night of the English-German soccer match in Belgium and the sports

bars were overflowing with rowdies. Though we did not see anything of the riots that screamed from the front pages of the newspapers the next morning, there were plenty of disturbances during the night in what is usually a quiet English seaside town.

June 17

The day began with a wakeup call by the Bournemouth street cleaner, which seemed to all but drive into bed with us. Then it was off on our first full day of gardens.

Winding through the country lanes of Dorset, with its charming thatched roofed cottages, we walked the final bit down a narrow hedge-rowed lane to Ivy Cottage. Along the way, we passed several charming cottage gardens, one with a very welcoming pair of golden retrievers, despite the sign proclaiming "Beware of the Dogs." We noted a very large shrub of *Buddleia globosa* festooned with its myriad of yellow balls, and marveled at the pink spires of *Centranthus* growing straight out of the walls. Fortunately, no vehicular traffic was encountered, for if we had had to move out of the way, the only spot for pedestrians was into the stinging nettles protruding from the edges of the hedgerow.

Anne Stevens and her husband warmly welcomed us to their Ivy Cottage nestled into two acres of charm, which appeared just as you would have imagined it, except for the fact there was no ivy on the walls. They had gardened there for 20 years. We observed our first *Rogersia pinnatum* 'Superba' showing its burgundy buds and marveled at a little red rock rose (*Helianthemum* sp?). There were beautiful ferns and many forms of companulas. The vegetable garden was ornamented with a lacewing fly house, taken into the garage during the winter for the hibernating flies (similar to dragonflies). After being served drinks and bickies under the heather bush, we strolled back up the lane to the coach.

The second garden of the day was Montacute, a large manor house. It was another National Trust House and Garden, and on this particular Sunday it was open under the National Garden Scheme to benefit various charities.

The front of the yellow stone mansion was bordered with Mexican orange blossom (*Choisya ternata*, Z-7, AGM) [AGM=Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society], just coming out of flower but the foliage had a magnificent citrus scent. I was bowled over by the *Parthenocissus henryii* (highly silver-veined form of Virginia creeper, Z-7 AGM) growing up a wall, and two massive chestnut trees whose trunks looked as if they had been extruded from a soft ice cream machine. The roses were lovely, and in the charming Gothic garden house, individual roses and other flowering perennials from the garden were displayed and labeled for identification and smelling. The long avenue of clipped pyramidal yews leading up to the front of the mansion was most dramatic.

It would have been the perfect visit, except that, upon our departure, a certain member of the party left his camera case in the garden restaurant (delicious ginger ice cream, again). The group was held up for a short time on the picturesque square of Montacute village, much to the consternation of the locals, who did not appreciate the blight on the landscape. After queuing in the restaurant service line, the camera case was safely retrieved and we were on our way. (Seven points off for gardening misconduct!)

We proceeded to another lovely manor house for our final garden of the first day--Maperton. Driving into the manor house courtyard you had no hint of the lovely garden to come. It had been created by Lady "Somebody" whose grave was located near the marvelous old chapel under a pale lavender 15' mallow (*Lavatera maritima*, Z-9, AGM).

The spectacular garden was behind and below the main house in a hidden valley, or combe. It was approached at the upper end by a descending staircase to the terrace of the orangery created in the 20th century. Halfway down the staircase was a stone bench nestled romantically against a towering stone wall awash with white and mauve English daisies' (*Erigeron karbinsianus*).

Millennium Trip to England (continued)



The garden then descended through a very formal terraced area, into a semi-formal area which included a wonderful old rectangular swimming pool. The garden ended in an arboretum (lots of North American trees, as they were a favorite of the present owner) which ultimately led out into the countryside.

I marveled at a little shady nook surrounding a stone bench with two larger-than-life moss-covered sleeping pelicans standing guard. Coming back out of the garden near the entrance was an enormous specimen of *Acer griseum* (paper bark maple, Z-4, AGM), with its cinnamon colored, peeling bark. The late afternoon sun backlit the peeling bark, giving the appearance that the tree was adorned with stones of amber. I had never before appreciated this feature of this spectacular maple.

As the bus began pulling away, a docent came chasing down the lane waving a small journal that, once again, a certain member of the party had left behind (one more point off for gardening misconduct). By the way, the garden shop here had a wonderful collection of terra cotta made by a family of Spanish potters. A number of pots climbed on the bus with us, amidst comments of "how will you ever get that on the plane?"

As the coach rolled through the Dorset countryside, the sheep grazing between the hedgerows and thatched roofed cottages were almost dreamlike. I appreciated the cottage walls made of several rows of bricks separated by a row of flints. Periodically, the woods were dotted with the spires of the native pink foxgloves (*Digitalis purpurea*), and yellow fields of rape or blue fields of flax (for oil production) occasionally flashed by.

June 19

The next day we visited gardens in County Somerset. We began at the legendary Hadspen House. Most of us were familiar with the present

gardeners (Nori and Sandra Pope) and their book **Color by Design**. They have a wonderful way of gardening, creating more than a half-mile of perennial borders with entire sections devoted to shades of a single color. There were stunning examples of "color echoes" throughout.

Penelope Hobhouse was the gardener here for many years, as she had married into the family. The present gardeners had leased the garden since 1987. Eric Smith, the great plant hybridizer, had developed many plants while in residence during Penelope's days. There was an entire walk devoted to his plants, which included *Brunnera macrophylla* 'Hadspen cream' (the best of the variegated brunneras) and a wealth of hostas developed by a cross with *H. tardiva* and *H. sieboldiana*--'Hadspen Blue' (my personal favorite blue hosta), 'Halcyon', and 'Hadspen Heron', among others.

I was taken with the Rodgersia border, containing the national collection including the spectacular *R. pinnata* 'Superba'. Sandra told us that Blooms of Bressingham was producing these in large quantities from seeds or tissue culture, but the best color was only available as a clone from a mother plant (sigh--I am afraid that all of us who purchased those plants at Johanssen's last summer will be somewhat disappointed when they finally bloom). We were all reluctant to leave this wonderful, magical place.

The second garden was Barrington Court, a house and garden restored by the Lyle family (English sugar barons). There was both a very formal and an informal restaurant here. The informal one (again delicious ice cream) was called The Beagle Kennel. Don't worry, they didn't throw the food down on the floor and the patrons did not howl when the food appeared. (Actually, the service was so slow, you wanted to howl when you finally worked your way up to the head of the food queue.)

In the garden I was wowed by the enormous flowers of Canterbury bells (*Campanula medium*, a bian-

nual). The rose garden was quite garish, with enormous flowers of pink and yellow reminding me of the straw hats you used to be able to buy at Woolworths, whose brims were decorated with similarly colored artificial roses. Most found this somewhat offensive, but I enjoyed the very bold and unforgettable statement the roses made.

There was a lovely white garden, just outside of which was an enormous climbing hydrangea dripping over an arched doorway in an ancient stone wall. I fell in love with the walled kitchen garden (food used in the restaurants) with its rhubarb forcing pots and a toolhouse completely made out of terra cotta tiles. This was to die for. This was the most impressive kitchen garden we would see on the trip. We were also taken with the borders of *Sisyrinchium striatum*, a large member of this genus, with iris-like leaves and spires of pale, yellow flowers. We were to see this plant in many subsequent gardens.

Our final garden of the day, Hestercombe, was the spectacular garden created by Edwin Lutyens (Lut-chens) and Gertrude Jekyll (Jee-keel). We were first led through the recently restored Georgian landscape garden, which proceeded up a narrow valley populated with sheep and architectural follies. Combe is an old English word for this steep-walled narrow valley. Our elderly guide, Margaret Sharply, was a memorable, elderly, opinionated, English lady.

There was a magnificent cascading waterfall, which was the largest and highest we would see. In typical good garden design fashion, you were drawn to the sound long before you rounded the corner where it suddenly came into view. One folly was called the mausoleum, though no one was actually buried there. Margaret also led us to the Lutyens and Jekyll formal gardens. Through a wonderful iron work gate, we first entered the walled "Dutch garden" and proceeded through a series of very formal gardens laid out in front of and below the manor house. The stone work was fabulous—rills,

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roundels (one containing a jewel like ebony spleenwort), walls, and stone pillared pergolas. In the distance, a young woman was calling the cows home for the evening.

We then journeyed to the village of Moreton-Hempstead in the Dartmoor National Park. Our hotel, The Manor House, was located on a lonely rode two miles from town. It was just as you might imagine, an enormous stone mansion looking out on the craggy peaks of the Dartmoor. We caught glimpses of pigs, sheep, cattle, a red fox, and lots of bunnies scampering everywhere. The house had been built by W.H. Smith (yes the famous London stationer and bookseller) in 1904, on 6000 acres, in the style of a Medieval Manor House. Architecturally it was a gem, and we enjoyed poking around the place with its very ornate public rooms. One room, done in the Adams style, was like the outside of a Wedgwood urn.

Shortly after arrival, a certain member of the group learned that you should not jump into the shower and wash out your underwear before the luggage is delivered. If you do not heed this advice, you may miss dinner for lack of appropriate attire that is anything but "smart casual."

After a wonderful evening meal of lamb, coffee was served in the great drawing room and a few of us braved the elements to tour the park-like grounds. We were especially impressed with two enormous weeping beech trees (*Fagus sylvatica* 'Pendula', Zone 5 AGM) and some large *Sequoiadendron giganteum* (California redwoods).

Later that evening, as the wind and rain came up over the moor, all the phones went dead in the hotel. We were certain that the power was going to go out and we would all go around with candles like Mary at Mistlethwaite Manor in the Secret Garden. As the wind howled outside the windows, some swore they heard the cries of the Hounds of the Baskervilles. Incidentally, the

movie of the aforementioned was actually filmed at the Manor House.

June 20

Breakfast the next morning was an adventure, as the breakfast buffet was attacked by a very large tour group of Deutsche Frauen, who literally swept the serving tables clean down to the last dollop of yogurt. After waiting for the staff to restock the tables, we were able to lick our wounds and get ready for the rest of the day.

As we set out over the moor, we failed to see any of the famous ponies, and we wished we could have witnessed some of our breakfast "friends" being hauled to the Dartmoor Prison. The vegetation was basically gorse, bracken fern and scrub oak. At one point, one of us had to use the loo facilities on the coach, and appropriately compared the experience to sitting on a porch swing. Someone else was afraid that if you pressed the wrong loo button, you might be ejected into a gorse bush.

After proceeding for more than an hour in heavy traffic on narrow winding roads through tiny picturesque villages, it became apparent that our itinerary for the day was in need of a revision, or we would be spending the night on the coach. Fortunately, just at that very moment, we passed a road sign which said "Rosemoor 1/4 mile." We took this as a divine sign that our group should visit this RHS garden. It was a very good decision as affirmed by the number of rolls of film shot here. After two hours of wandering around the gardens in a state of disbelief and rapture, a hasty vote was taken and we all agreed to spend another two hours here, including a lunch stop.

Lady Anne Berry had donated the grounds to the RHS after she moved to New Zealand with her second husband ten years ago. The gardens around her former home were lovely, and the new demonstration gardens (rose garden, kitchen garden, shade garden, foliage garden, spiral garden, stream garden, water garden, fruit garden, winter garden) were exquisite and boggled the mind.

I was taken with the large masses of *Penstemon* 'Catherine De La Mare' behind the four benches in the rose garden, and the large shrubs of lupines (*Lupinus arboreas*, both white and yellow forms). Other new plants were *Rehmania angulata* (rich, burgundy bells), *Phlomis fyticosa* 'Augustifolia', *Verbascum* 'Polar Summer', and masses of pink and white *Centranthus* again growing out of the walls. On the path connecting the demonstration gardens to the Lady Anne Gardens, there was an exquisite woodland garden complete with a stream and waterfall. Here there was a large clump of *Bergenia ciliata* (wonderful large hairy leaves), *Hosta* 'Uzu No Mia' (that little one that hardly looks like a hosta and is impossible to grow), *Arisaema candidissimum* (snow-white spathes), and *Arisaema flavum* (tiny yellow spathes). Shrubs and trees included a magnificent frilly *Cornus alternifolia* 'Argentea' (Zone 3?, AGM), several of the most beautiful paper barked birches I have ever seen, and many *Prunus* including *P. serrula*, with its highly polished, red-brown mahogany-like bark (Zone 7, AGM).

That afternoon we journeyed on to Marwood, the private garden of Dr. Smart, begun in 1949 on 20 acres of beautiful Devonshire countryside. The garden progressed down a long valley, with spectacular borrowed views of the surrounding hillsides, and a magnificent bell tower from a nearby church.

The garden contained the national collection of astilbes but unfortunately few were in bloom at the time or our visit. It also contained the national collection of Tulbaghas, if you have any idea what those are. I will never forget entering the lovely hilltop garden above the valley with its gorgeous perennial borders, and proceeding down the steps under a wisteria-covered (12 varieties) pergola, while serenaded by the most magnificent song thrush.

Plants that caught my eye were *Thalictrum minus* (very small leafed, relatively short, with yellow flowers), *Salvia officinalis* 'Hispanica', and a fabulous large clump of the fern,

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Dryopteris felix-mas 'Linearis'. Wonderful woodies included *Cuphea cyaniea*, *Berberis* 'Pink pearls' (beautiful new pink growth), and your reward for traversing down to the very end of the valley, *Sambucus nigra* 'Thundercloud' (an elderberry with deep purple red foliage and pink clouds of blossoms). I was also finally able to identify *Cytisus battandieri*, or the "pineapple broom," whose huge yellow clusters of pea-like flowers we had seen espaliered against so many walls in the various gardens. Yes, the flowers did have a mild pineapple odor.

Some folks did not finish the garden walk, but made a beeline to the nearby village church for a "proper cream tea" (scones, jam, and clotted cream). From all reports, the local ladies serving the homemade scones to the sinners among our group were a hoot.

On the way back to the Manor House, we watched the video of the 2000 Chelsea Flower Show, with its fabulous new marquee. At the hotel that night we had the dining room nearly to ourselves. Our dinner was served hidden under silver warming domes, which were removed by the staff with great aplomb at the appropriate moment. And, of course, dessert was served with the famous Devonshire "clotted cream." It was a dark, gloomy and windy night out on the moor and some were certain they again could hear the hounds of the Baskervilles off in the distance and the cry of "Heathcliff, Heathcliff." As for me, I retreated to the "snooker room" for a game of pool.

June 21

The next day, we had the longest coach ride of the trip, up to Shrewsbury. For the umpteenth time we drove passed the Wellington Monument to the Battle of Waterloo (a rather fat obelisk perched on the top of a hill), located in the village of Wellington, though the village had actually changed its name to Wellington and built the monument

only as a tourist ploy. As far as I am concerned, my "wellies" are monument enough. We passed through the Mendip Hills and the exit for the village of Cheddar before arriving at Lower Hall in the tiny, quaint red-yellow brick and sandstone village of Warfield, home of Chris and Donna Dumbell on the River Ware.

Members of our party knew Donna, born in Dubuque, Iowa. The Dumbells served us a wonderful salmon lunch. Donna gave tours of the 1650 Manor House and explained what life had been like 400 years ago. We enjoyed the lovely riverside garden with two bridges, 400 roses (all in bloom) and many interesting woodies. Laning Roper designed part of the garden. An interesting feature was the water ram, which made a romantic low-pitched thump-thump noise as it pumped water from the river into the various water features, without the use of electricity.

Rosa 'Fantin Latour's large pale pink double flowers were exquisite in the shrub border. I was also taken with a green glazed pottery, which had been purchased from a potter at the Hampton Court Flower Show the previous summer. An interesting anecdote told to us by Pat Edwards (friend of the Dumbells and holder of the national Hamamelius collection) was that the house had been purchased from Sir Oliver Laase, one of Montgomery's WW II generals, an eccentric who had a cactus nursery (appropriate for an eccentric old army general, is it not?) on the grounds. He provided entertainment to the villagers with a yearly festival which featured a Mexican band and an old donkey, though I can't imagine a more inappropriate spot to hold such a festival. Well, at least he had had the ghost exorcised from the manor house.

Our second garden of the day, thanks to the Dumbells' recommendation, was Preen Manor, owned by Mr. and Mrs. Trevor-Jones. It was located in the small village of Preen Church and literally adjoined the 12th century village church. Mrs. Trevor-Jones is vice-president of the National Garden Scheme (for charity), and the

implication is that she will be president next year. She and her husband gave us an introduction to the garden, which was really the most "perfected" (affected?) garden we were to see on the trip.

The grass was of putting green quality, often strewn with rose petals. 500-year-old yews were located near the entrance to the garden, which itself was a series of spectacular rooms obviously inspired by Sissinghurst and Hidcote. The centerpiece for the garden was the world's most beautifully shaped ancient cedar of Lebanon, and the 800-year-old village church was the ultimate garden ornament. There was a very modern sunken "chess garden," strangely enough nearly devoid of plants, a gazebo with a fish and a cat, a truly secret garden, a petal garden, and a stream walk. The landscape was spectacular and the silence of the place was complete. Everywhere you looked there was a surprise and a must photograph, and in my excitement to load yet another roll of film, I opened my camera before the film had even finished rewinding (This, is not a very good idea!).

We all agreed the garden was almost obscenely preened, and at least one person, after completing the tour, said that she longed to see at least one blob of goose poop on the lawn somewhere. We couldn't help but take note that with our very prompt departure, a covey of gardeners was scurrying about tidying up things for the next group (no bruised rose petals on the grass, please), whose bus was already coming up the lane.

That night we stayed just outside of Shrewsbury (rhymes with woes) at Albrighton Hall, which had formerly been a private school. There was much activity on the grounds, and we were shocked to see two loos perched in the center of the front lawn, which were utilized for some of the evenings entertainment for some other guests staying at the hotel (where they on an English plumbing tour?). We had some difficulty getting our assigned rooms, and then some of us wish we had never found them. The lights were activated by

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a box on the wall, which required the insertion of your key card, and my own pull out bed had a mattress of stuffed poultry netting. After a drunken brawl on the front lawn by some of the other hotel guests (again, must have been a plumbing group), we were treated to a marvelous fireworks display in honor of the summer solstice, unless of course you were one of the ones trying to get to sleep. And if the fireworks weren't enough, the disco band made noise until 4 AM.

June 22

This was Ladies' Day at Ascott, just in case you were interested. We had hoped to catch a glimpse of the Queen Mother's hat, which was described by our guide as a moving herbaceous border. However, we opted for the National Trust Garden, Powis Castle, just a few miles over the Welsh border. (Did you know that the Welsh word for child was plant? No wonder some of us were confused).

Powis Castle itself was built in the 17th century, but the gardens had been created by the Herbert family during the last hundred years, particularly the Countess Violet. Note, it was not the Count, as not long after the marriage he agreed to turn the management of the gardens over to his wife, obviously unaware of what damage a woman can do with an unlimited checking account.

The terraces below the castle walls were done in the Italianate style, the water garden was French influenced, and the great lawn at the bottom has been described as "the largest lawn in captivity" after the Mall in Washington, DC. Other than the remarkable terraces, the great free formed, blobby yews spilling down the ends of the terraces were a signature piece.

We had as our personal guide Peter Hall, the head gardener, complete with fiery Welsh red hair and beard. He was charming. I was awed with the plantings in the large urns placed in the ancient wall niches, which

contained a rare double nasturtium (propagated by cuttings only) and a gorgeous, weeping, black flowered salvia with gray leaves (*Salvia discolor*). I was also taken by the underplantings in the rose garden, which included great masses of the pale lavender viola, *V. cornuta*. Spectacular woodies included *Arbutus unedo* (a deadly plant who's Latin name is translated as "eat one only") and the great silvery masses of *Acer pseudoplatanus* 'Brilliantissima'. And of course, we saw the very grand *Artemisia* 'Powis Castle'.

Unfortunately, a rather steady cold rain began halfway through our tour and even I was glad to retreat to the garden restaurant for a delicious lunch of apple-cheese soup. Did anyone perchance try the orange lolly ice cream? Boarding the bus proved to be eventful. Despite performing the requisite recitative about when and where we were to re-board the bus before disembarking, one member of our group got the time mixed up and kept us waiting for a half an hour (20 points off for gardening misconduct).

The afternoon garden on the agenda was Spetchley Place, owned by the Berkeley (pronounced Barkley) family. Mr. John Berkeley himself led a tour of the gardens and explained that they lived at Spetchley Park only in the summer, preferring to over-winter at historic Berkely Castle. Interestingly enough, his aunt, Rose Berkeley, sister of the infamous Ellen Willmott of Warley Place, designed the garden.

Spetchley Park consisted of 30 acres, most of it woodland and pastures. The most extraordinary site was thousands and thousands of martagon lilies in full bloom, which were naturalized in the woodlands and meadows of the property, reminiscent of Scandinavia. There was a beautiful newly-created "Millennium Garden" with a stunning covered arbor of espaliered *Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy', with its gorgeous red-purple foliage. Can you imagine this arbor in full bloom in the spring? I was also taken with rows and rows of sweet peas on

stick tripods throughout the vegetable garden. Other spectacular woodies on view were *Rhus verniciflua* (Chinese lacquer tree), *Juniperous media* 'Carberry gold' and a fabulous yellow *Clematis Tangutica* 'Golden Tiara'.

Some of us indulged (engorged?) in the Old Laundry Tearoom on the estate before the departure. Others took time to visit the 16th century church on the property with wonderful effigy mausoleums, which I noted to be occasionally marked with the words "died without issue."

It was some drive to the hotel Hatton Court, in which many of us had previously lodged on the June 1998 trip with the WHPS. This is a charming 17th century hotel on a hilltop overlooking the Severn Valley with the great cathedral of Gloucester on the horizon. We enjoyed the three nights here, which included the individually cooked hot English breakfasts, which did take some time, as there were 33 of us! Some of us, in desperation while waiting for the food, dared to try "marmite," a disgustingly nauseating spread made from yeast extract. More of a hit were the Scottish kippers. All agreed that the grilled bacon was the best we had had on the journey. That same weekend, a murder mystery group was also on the premises, but I am pleased to report that no one found any bodies lying in their rooms.

June 23

Come morning, we set out for the Old Mill Denne (pronounced Dean), the charming cottage garden of Wendy Dare located in the postcard perfect Cotswold village of Blockley. The cottage was fronted with an old millpond, and we were warmly greeted by the resident ducks, Jeremiah and Donna.

Wendy, a charming hostess, led us on a wonderful tour of her garden in which she had been working for 17 years. Much of the pottery and hardscaping was of a lovely blue-green color. There was a cricket lawn with a real cricket bench and we were introduced to "Lady Blockley," the resident scarecrow.

Millennium Trip to England (continued)



Most of us made it up to the top of the garden to the "sulking house," with a nearby cemetery for Wendy's pet cats, complete with headstones.

We were introduced to the Mediterranean shrub "Billoto" whose leaves were soft and furry just like Wendy's cats. The flowers, when soaked in olive oil, had been known since Greek times to burn like candles. I was smitten with the giant pink foxtail lily (*Eremurus robustus*, nearly 7' tall, and by the way, available through McClure and Zimmerman) and another shrub--*Prosthranera cuneata* (Z 9, AGM) that produced an oily camphor-like smell.

For some, the garden tour ended with tea and homemade cakes. It didn't matter to these folks that they had completed a full English breakfast just a couple of hours before. Other ideas taken from Wendy's vegetable garden were the fake millstones created from limestone blocks as centerpieces and beachball-sized glazed terracotta balls (reportedly from Vietnam).

From Wendy's garden we proceeded to one of the most typical Cotswold villages--Chipping-Camden, where we had time for lunch and a little poking around. Most of us missed the memorial garden, created in 1994 by Roy Lancaster for Chinese Wilson (1876-1930), a village native. It was a small walled garden behind a great chestnut tree, which included introductions from his many trips to the Far East to collect plants, including *Acer griseum* (Z 4, AGM), *Davidia involucrata* (dove tree, Z 6, AGM), and *Lilium regale*. Ironically, Chinese Wilson survived many an expedition to remote dangerous areas, only to die in an automobile accident in Boston, where he was the director of Harvard's Arnold Arboretum.

A wonderful tree in the market square was *Sorbus* 'Brilliant Beam', whose gray-blue leaves were covered with a wonderful farina. Another highlight of visiting this village was

observing a pair of real-life, genuine thatchers, re-thatching a roof.

After our free time, we proceeded to Kiftsgate, just a few miles outside of the village. This was a lovely garden made by three generations of female gardeners. We were given an introduction to the garden by Ann Chambers, the present gardener and also the granddaughter of the founder. Her grandmother was highly influenced by her friend Lawrence Johnston and his garden, Hidcote, just down the road.

Like Hidcote, this garden has grand vistas out over the Vale of Evesham. Unfortunately, the Kiftsgate rose, the largest rose in England (a 50-year-old rose described by Ann as a "bit of a monster") had only a few single white flowers, unlike the vast majority of roses in the garden, which were at their peak bloom.

I admired two *Lonicera*'s, the bush honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum* 'Belgica' (early Dutch honeysuckle, Z-4 AGM), and *Lonicera japonica* 'Aureoreticulata' (Z-5), whose wonderfully yellow-veined leaves were used as accents in pots of annuals.

The most striking and unique "room" garden at Kiftsgate was the new modern garden, which had only been open a week. Created from the former family tennis court, it was a green garden consisting of a large rectangular reflecting pool, containing a central green-grass island approached by snow-white rectangular stepping stones across the water. At one end, out of the water majestically arose 10-foot-high sculptures of *Colocasia esculanta* leaves (elephant ears) on long slender stems, which swayed in the breezes. The leaves themselves (nickel-plated bronze which were then gold plated) dazzled in the sunshine, and were marvelously reflected in the black still water. Every now and then water would trickle down the leaves and off their points into the still water below. It was all quite magical and something straight out of *Gardens Illustrated*. For me, it was the single most memorable garden of the trip, though it was received with

mixed reactions in our group, from "the ultimate Tai Chi garden" to "one step below pink flamingos."

Overlooking the scene was the old rustic tennis shelter in the contrasting style of Edwin Lutyens. There were also two fabulous sculptures in the garden by Simon Verity--a Madonna and an elegant relief of a bull and sheep. Throughout the garden was placed the famous Hidcote blue wrought iron furniture, though one member of our group was overheard saying, "such garden furniture loses its value when you are plagued by mosquitoes."

Back at the hotel that evening, we heard the woes from the one non-gardener in our group, who had taken the day off from gardens to visit Gloucester, which was fine, except he forgot the name of the hotel. He had to call the dog sitter back in the states to check the itinerary, before he good direct the taxi driver back to the hotel. Just desserts, I would say.

After a delicious lamb dinner, a twilight stroll down to the sleepy village of Upton-St.Leonards led to the discovery of *Impatiens glandulifera* in the roadside ditch. Having attempted to germinate this six foot pink flowered beauty from the Himalayas on several occasions (see color photo on page 63 of Eyck and Winterwoods' **A Year at North Hill**), it was a thrill to make several cuttings. I had already learned from our guide how to "properly" make "pinchings" from English gardens---save your plastic mineral water bottles, slip the cuttings through the narrow neck, add a little water, and just cut out the bottom of the container when you have safely arrived back at home, theft undetected. I am happy to report my pinchings survived, and I now have a large blooming plant of this impatien. If you are nice to me, I just might share a few seeds with you.

June 24

The next morning, we were off to visit a late 20th century gardening shrine--Rosemary Verey's Barnsley House. Charles Verey himself gave us an introduction to his "favorite



garden," while his dog nosed around and through the crowd. Built in 1697, the Cotswold stone manor house had the typical oolite stone roof. The Gothic garden house had only been in place since 1770, however. The 18th century temple folly had been given to Rosemary's husband serendipitously by The National Trust, which was looking for a good home for the structure, previously housed on a nearby estate.

The garden, showing the influence of Gertrude Jekyll and William Robinson, was a "curtsy to the house." I was smitten with the peach colored fox tail lilies (*Eremerus robustus*, again) waving in the cool wind, and the large deep blue flowered *Clematis x durandii* (AGM) behind a blue garden gate. The pottager garden was lovely as usual, and I admired the pastel colored poppies (*Papaver somnifera*) dotted about.

Again I was reminded that the family had patronized the sculptor Simon Verity many years ago, and his elegant works had obviously used Rosemary's mother dressed in her riding clothes, as well as Rosemary herself in elegant gardening garb, as models.

To top off the morning, Rosemary herself held court in the grottoed solarium. Surrounded by piles of her books (if you bought every one it totaled \$160), she was in her prime, autographing individual copies after placing the money in her trademark cigar box. With a wave of her hand, she sent one of us out to fetch more plastic bags for the many purchases and another into the house to get more books. After reading to us from her **A Country Woman's Diary**, from the month of June no less, she recalled her visit to Milwaukee a few years ago. When one of us admired *Pelargonium* 'Lord Bute' (deep purple-maroon, AGM) behind her, she reminded us that she had designed the gardens of Lord Bute's Scottish estate, near Glasgow.

After making a regretful departure from Barnsley House, we were on our way through the Cotswold countryside. The hedgerows on either side of the road seemed to swallow our enormous coach, but after some time we arrived at Trevi Garden, in Hartpury, the private garden of Gilbert and Sally Gough, which was known to some of us from a previous WHPS visit to the vicinity.

It was a delight to visit a one-acre garden belonging to just ordinary folks who did not employ a retinue of gardeners, and who, in fact, had done all of the gardening themselves. Sally and Gilbert had been gardening on the site for 34 years, and it was easy to see the influences of all the beautiful estate gardens we had visited to date.

There was a stream garden, an alpine garden, a bog garden, a rose garden, and clematis garden, kitchen garden, and a secret garden all ingeniously divided into rooms with hedges and latticework. Sally had a collection of over 100 clematis, all which seemed to be in bloom, and what must have been hundreds of hardy geraniums in flower. There were even a few exotic epimediums still in bloom, which Sally carefully pointed out to me. Everyone got a laugh seeing "caterpillar hill" off on the distant horizon.

The lunch that Sally treated us to on the garden terrace was divine. I will always remember the selection of local cheeses which included a scrumptious cheddar, a cheese flavored with pickle and ale, and the obviously award-winning Stilton, flavored with bits of apricot. And, of course, we were treated to a slice of Sally's infamous almond tort with our tea. All in all, I think everyone was overwhelmed with the sheer beauty that this endearing couple had created! I couldn't help but note a quote posted in Sally's kitchen--"A garden is a beautiful thing, but a job forever."

Gilbert then led us over more hedgerow-choked lanes to the garden of their friends at Cinderdine Cottage. This was a small garden created by John and Daphne Chappell. It was

the ultimate in a plantsman's garden, for everywhere you looked there was a plant you had never seen before, to the delight of our host. It took me 15 minutes to get beyond the plants just around the garden entrance gate.

Notable new plants were *Cephalaria gigantea*, *Hoheria lyalli* (AGM), a double abutilon, *Euphorbia* 'Fen's ruby', *Baccharis patagonia* (AGM), *Pulmonaria* 'Cotton wool', a marvelous clump of *Iris foetidissima*, with its pale strangely-veined flowers in full shade (AGM), *Neillia thibetica*, with its lovely pink tubular pink flowers (another Chinese Wilson plant), a lovely border of *Phuopsis stylosa* (like a pink sweet woodruff), *Achillea grandiflora* (also known as *Tanacetum macrophyllum*), and *Ozothamnus ledifolius*, with starry white flowers and also known as the fruitcake bush because of its odor. On leaving the garden, one of our party suggested that we change our name to the Wisconsin "Wish It Were Hardy" Society.

That evening, back at Hatton Court, we hosted Sally, Gilbert, John and Daphne for dinner. Perhaps it was just the bottles of wine courtesy of Queensberry Travel, but there was certainly a magical quality to the evening as the sun set symbolically through the windows over the Severn Vale (why was it always sunny in the evenings?). Gilbert and Sally were like an old 1920's vaudeville team as they worked the crowd with their jokes. At one point, I casually mentioned to Gilbert that all their garden lacked was an 18th century folly. He merely laughed, and replied "What do you mean? She's sitting at the next table."

Again, when I said to Gilbert that it must be wonderful to garden in the same place for 34 years, he answered with a typical British understatement: "Gardened???" (long pause) "What do you mean? We just like plants!" When I asked him how often they had groups like ours visit the garden, he retorted, "Isn't one a year, of a group like this one, quite enough?"

On a much more somber note, Gilbert and Sally told me that they



were getting along in years and thought this might be the last summer for their garden. They wanted to quit why they felt things were in their prime. Thinking back to Spetchely Park and Lord Berkeley, I could certainly see their point. They said in some respects the garden had become a monster, as there was always a group of visitors coming tomorrow or the next day, which did not allow them to enjoy other things in the golden years. I was saddened to think that Trevi would live on only in memory and perhaps I could squeeze in only one more visit before its demise.

At the end of the evening, Sally had to lead Gilbert off with a rope--he was still in his prime and the life of the party. The couple made a wonderful foil for each other, to use a few of Gilbert's own words.

June 25

The morning dawned the usual gray, but with the promise that things would improve as the hours unfolded. Our first stop on the way back towards the outskirts of London was Priory House. As we passed through the posh village of Sunningdale, with its famous golf course, we passed several elegant nurseries and garden centers in the area, whose parking lots were filled with cars.

The lovely home and garden Priory House was a delight as we were hosted by the present owners, Jenny Leigh and her husband. The garden was originally designed by Percy Cane in the 1930's, and the grand dame (Mrs. Charles Andreae) who ruled over its development died in the house 60 years later, because she loved the garden so.

The tour began with tea and cookies in the formal drawing room, which literally spilled out into the garden through double French doors. The room itself was done in a lovely pale yellow, and I was awed by the backlit pale green frieze of olive green glass over the mantle piece.

The roses were in their prime throughout this relatively small private garden, and the three-year-old garden of old fashion shrub roses, underplanted with lavender, was a delight. The fragrance was overpowering. I also marveled at the beautiful fringed *Dianthus* 'Rainbow loveliness', with its lovely perfume. There was an unidentified yellow martagon lily and a pale yellow foxglove--*Digitalis viridiflora*.

The Leighs were animal lovers, as noted by the two gorgeous Norwegian golden retrievers who delighted in chasing the frogs in the bog garden. There was also hutch of longhaired "Persian" rabbits, and, of all things, a cage of chipmunks!

We also admired again the deep red dianthus seen in many gardens, which we had dubbed *Dianthus* 'Cherries jubilee' (*Dianthus rubra* ?) There was also a unique thyme garden created on Jennie's 40th birthday from the thyme plants contributed by party guests. I always will remember the garden for its wonderful collection of ceramic pots. I must have taken a dozen pot photographs.

The rest of the day was spent at the Wisley---the main show garden of the Royal Horticulture Society. As many of us had visited this two years ago at about the same time of year, we were able to pick and choose the highlights. Our little group headed up Battleston Hill almost immediately, surveying the huge double perennial border and the woody plant collection. Several large flowering clumps of the woodland *Lilium hansonii* caught my eye.

Once over the top of the hill we passed into the trial gardens in Portsmouth Field. Too bad this is adjacent to the Motorway, as the noise of the traffic was deafening. The trial gardens of delphiniums and sweetpeas were at their peak bloom. The creamy towers of *Delphinium* 'Sunbeam' (AWG) were particularly outstanding. I was much less impressed with the ajuga and dianthus trial gardens. In the lavender trial garden, a stunning deep blue specimen was placed in the center of

the plot such that the label was impossible to read. I am very sorry to report that this did not stop one of our members from leaping the fence to check the label. Oh shame!! I am also sorry to report that as the information was obtained illegally, with much impropriety, the name of this cultivar cannot be revealed in the press, as it may prejudice the jury. For this gardening misconduct, the only suitable punishment is a trip disqualification!

Tucked behind the sweetpeas was a new Heuchera trial garden. You can forget about *H. 'Rachel'*, which we all raved about two years ago. There are now six new cultivars on my wish list, all with outstanding foliage (silver veined or purple) and showy flowers. These were 'Cherries Jubilee', 'Ebony & Ivory', 'Palace Passion', 'Fireworks', 'Smokey Rose', and my absolute favorite for its compact size, 'Petite Pearl Fairy'.

We also made a quick trip through the alpine houses, with their jewel-like specimens, as well as the glass houses. I was very impressed with the fuchsia collection and made a long list of *Solenostemons* (coleus) and Rex begonias to look out for. Outside, one of the alpine houses I was also impressed with a miniature thalictrum--*T. urbani*. I did major damage in the bookstore and the plant center with my Visa card (I wasn't alone in this endeavor) before boarding the bus for the Copthorne Hotel.

That night we had a farewell dinner of sorts, and poets galore came forth from our group. For the next trip, everyone is going to be required to have a poet's license. We also made plans for a reunion the third Sunday in January at Olbrich Gardens, as John Fritsch and John Cannon once again agreed to do a slide and music show of our 2000 trip to England. We also agreed that in June, 2002, there would be WHPS trip to northern England and Scotland.

June 26

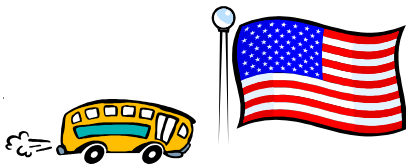
The next morning, those going to Heathrow left on an early morning bus, and despite heavy traffic on the M-25 (the dreaded ring road around

Millennium Trip to England (continued)

London), we all made it in plenty of time to catch our flights. Those going out from nearby Gatwick had time for a more leisurely breakfast and departure. The return flight to O'Hare was uneventful and customs a breeze.

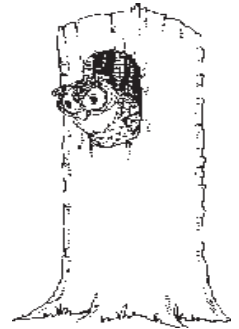
It was somewhat unsettling to get back here to our own neglected gardens. Mrs. Preen Manor certainly wouldn't have approved, though I am happy to report there is plenty of dog poop around.

As one traveler was heard to say, it was so wonderful to enter the world of English gardens for nine days with absolutely no interruptions!!



As soon as I mention any plant that wimped out in my garden, other gardeners will rush to point out how splendidly said plant thrives in their own garden. It's like telling someone that the Dalmatian I got for the family really ended up being a pest. I confess how happy we were to finally unload the pooch, giving it to a more forgiving dog lover after we could no longer stand its shedding everywhere, chewing up everything and really getting on our nerves. That is the cue for the listener to launch into how their Dalmatian is the complete antithesis of everything I bemoaned. I know, because at times I'm the vegetable equivalent. Some poor gardener will just have admitted she is at wit's end with some lackadaisical plant and I'll blithely reassure her that in my garden the plant practically leapt from its pot into the ground, grew at a prodigious rate with nary a smidgen of work on my part and now flowers gorgeously for months on end. The ensuing silence couldn't be hacked with a machete.

—From "Duds and Disappointments: One Gardener Confesses What Fizzled," Jim Gersbach, *Bulletin of the Hardy Plant Society of Oregon*, Spring, 1999.



I have, like all gardeners, an often ill-conceived belief that next year will be better, that the shrub I have religiously watered all year will not give up the ghost, that the great beech-walk branches will filter the late afternoon sun forever, that the hybrid rhododendrons will not be devastated by bud blast, that the magnolia blossoms will not again be scorched by frost. You win some and you lose many, and the seasons roll on bringing new delights and new sorrows, but I never regret having tried. Maybe next year things will be different. Of course they will be different—Nature always sees to that.

—"Night Thoughts of a Frustrated Gardener," Bryan Forbes, *Hortus*, No. 54, Summer 2000

I planted more than 400 bulbs this fall—some lasagna style. In fact, as I became more exhausted, I decided that was the only way to plant. I attempted to stay within the yellow-orange, purple and always white color ranges in the front yard. But the more boxes I opened and little packages I found, and the smaller the bulbs got, the criteria changed. Just find an empty spot with dirt soft enough to dig and throw them in, I reasoned—a nice natural look. Just an aside—why is it that the smaller the bulbs, the longer their names which I can never remember?

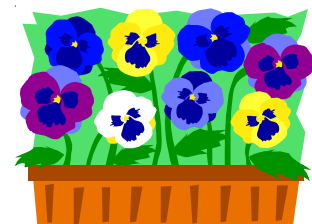
—**The Perfectly Imperfect Garden**, Barbara Blossom Ashmun

*I tend my flowers for thee—
Bright Absentee!
My Fuschia's Coral Seams
Rip—while the Sower—dreams—*

*Geraniums—tint—and spot—
Low Daisies—dot—
My Cactus—splits her Beard
To show her throat—*

*Carnations—tip their spice—
And Bees—pick up—
A Hyacinth—I hid—
Puts out a Ruffled Head—
And odors fall
From flasks—so small—
You marvel how they hel—*

Excerpt from a poem by Emily Dickinson, 1862



Excerpts from *The Invisible Garden*, Dorothy Sucher, Counterpoint, Washington DC, 1999 :

☀ Gardens give their owners so much joy and discontent that sometimes they seem to be a metaphor for life. There is more to them than meets the eye; all sorts of memories and emotions cling to them. The clump of lemon lilies recalls the day it mysteriously appeared on the doorstep, left by an anonymous caller; the delicate, finely-cut ferns of asparagus bring to mind the memory of a beloved grandfather; the sumptuous globe of a peony, bending under its own weight, serves as a reminder of a child's wonder at what seemed to be drops of blood on the white petals. I think of this complex of conscious and unconscious associations as an "invisible garden" that each of us, gardeners and garden visitors alike, carries around... We can never know in advance how walking through a garden will make us feel. Sometimes the fresh perceptions of childhood come back to us for a few glorious moments. Sometimes, seemingly for no reason at all, we become sad. Always it is the invisible garden that gives the visible garden its deepest meaning.

☀ I had no idea I was taking my first steps on the road to becoming a gardener with one of the most difficult kinds of gardening imaginable. As I poured over a newly-purchased book by Gertrude Jekyll and studied the pictures of stream gardens in magazines, my fever mounted. There were no cautionary notes, no warnings to the unwary: "Proceed at Your Own Risk." Everything was made to seem easy.

☀ The magazine version of gardening bears the same relation to real gardening by real people as the Hollywood version of romance does to the average person's love life. It took quite a while for me to realize this. The physical demands of stream-gardening made it no easy task for a middle-aged, overweight, sedentary woman with a touch of arthritis in the knees. Those photographs in brilliant Ektachrome gave no hint of the slimy stones, the clambering up and down muddy, slippery banks, and the tumbles into the water that I actually experienced. The topic of mosquitoes, blackflies, deerflies, and mud wasps never came up in the gardening books I consulted. Beavers? The havoc they could wreak was passed over in silence. Nor was there a word about floods of snowmelt that could wash away flimsily-built structures and cover the hopeful plantings with silt. There was certainly no mention of the money you should be prepared to spend, or the helpers you would have to hire, if you were serious about the enterprise.

☀ The gardener is always painfully aware of the gap between the dream and reality. Like every artist, she knows that whatever is achieved is nevertheless a betrayal of that first radiant vision.

☀ Gardening, like a religious discipline or any other truly worthwhile activity, daily brings us face to face with our own weaknesses, even as it holds out a hope for repentance and reform at some indefinite time in the future.

Wisconsin Hardy Plant Society



September 2000 Newsletter
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